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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that public information campaigns and promotional programs can have an impact on the extent to which citizens involve themselves in crime prevention. Subgroups such as the elderly may especially benefit from efforts more carefully tailored to their own needs and circumstances. The design of successful programs requires taking into account not only existing audience awareness, but knowledge of basic communication planning principles as well. Previous research on source, message, and channel factors in influencing audiences provides a substantial resource for campaign planners intent upon matching messages to particular audiences. Elements such as source credibility, fear appeals, use of humor, elements of message design, and channel information capacities have all been the subject of considerable research, and many of the findings have implications for media message design. Formative research can also present profiles of the mass and interpersonal communication patterns of specific target groups, and can address their motives for communicating and the kinds of gratifications they seek from doing so. Local neighborhood group campaigns should be integrated with more generalized media campaigns. Group participation may have particular benefits for the elderly in fighting crime. (Author/ABL)

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COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CRIME PREVENTION COMPETENCE AMONG ELDERLY PERSONS

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ABSTRACT

Recent evidence indicates that public information campaigns and promotional programs can have impact on the extent to which citizens involve themselves in crime prevention. Certain subgroups, the elderly in particular, may especially benefit from efforts more carefully tailored to their own needs and circumstances.

This report summarizes previous formative research on how elderly persons do--and do not--differ from other populations segments with respect to their orientations toward crime and its prevention. Recommendations are then offered for means of enhancing crime prevention competence among the elderly by paying greater attention to strategic goals, message content, channel selection, and audience targeting.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CRIME PREVENTION COMPETENCE AMONG ELDERLY PERSONS

Two previous Adult and Aging Division papers have detailed patterns of mass media use, interpersonal communication and information seeking among elderly persons (O'Keefe and Reid, 1988), as well as existing levels of crime prevention-related perceptions, attitudes and behaviors among the aged (O'Keefe and Reid, 1986). Findings from both papers were linked to respective previous literature and theoretical models. Both were part of a long-range National Institute of Justice-sponsored project to develop strategies for increasing the crime prevention competence of the aged through informational campaigns. This paper presents the final integration of findings from the study, with emphasis on specific recommendations for designing and targeting such campaigns. While of particular interest to those concerned about reduction of crime among the elderly, the recommendations notably have several implications for reaching that audience with information about such critical topics as health as well.

More specifically, this study identifies media and non-media strategies for informational campaigns directed at the elderly. Particular attention is given to campaigns dealing with crime prevention, and generalizations are offered concerning campaigns on such other preventive topics as health. The basic approach is one utilizing data from national probability sample surveys of elderly and non-elderly populations to identify: (1) What topic-related, mass media, and interpersonal communication

characteristics of the elderly distinguish them from other groups; (2) How those characteristics vary among different subgroups of individuals within the elderly; and (3) Which of those characteristics are important in devising preventive campaign strategies among the aged.

Our previous findings indicated that the elderly differ from other citizens in having distinctive concerns and fears concerning crime and other issues, and in having somewhat differing knowledge levels, attitudes, motivations and behaviors with respect to preventive behavior. They also indicate differences in their uses of communication and in their needs for information. These characteristics vary considerably depending upon their demographic, environmental, social, and psychological situations.

The findings lead to specific recommendations for strategies for use in programs to build prevention competence among elderly persons, i.e. to (1) Increase awareness and knowledge of appropriate preventive behaviors; (2) Build more positive attitudes concerning the efficacy of preventive actions; (3) Increase sense of capability in carrying out appropriate actions; (4) Motivate them toward greater interest in preventive activity; and (5) Increase their levels of appropriate preventive activity.

These findings provide an empirical baseline to allow a more precise targeting of the aged as an audience for information campaigns concerning crime prevention, and by extension health and a host of related social service issue areas as well. By

taking the findings into account, such strategies may be more productively geared toward the characteristics of elderly persons, providing less of a risk of scattershot "hit or miss" informational and promotional efforts, which tend to be inefficient in terms of cost and effort.

Public Information Campaigns, Crime and the Elderly

The recent evaluation of the National Crime Prevention Campaign ("Take a Bite Out of Crime") clearly shows that public information campaigns can be effective in promoting more positive attitudes and behaviors among citizens with respect to crime prevention (O'Keefe, 1985; 1986; O'Keefe and Reid, 1989). The findings also indicate that certain subgroups --the elderly, in particular -- may benefit more from individualized campaigns and other promotional techniques carefully targeted toward their own crime-related needs and circumstances.

Past indications among the elderly of distinctive victimization patterns, heightened fear of crime, and possibly ambivalent participation in constructive crime prevention activities pose a problematic situation for professionals concerned with enhancing the crime prevention competence of this group and reducing their risk of being victimized. Adding to the dilemma is their apparent lesser responsiveness to prevention campaigns aimed at the general public.

In response to the above issues, the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Department of Justice, funded

this research is to identify those media and non-media strategies which would more effectively increase the crime prevention competence of the elderly by:

1. Increasing their crime and crime prevention awareness and knowledge;

2. Promoting more positive beliefs, attitudes and support regarding their roles in and contributions to crime prevention;

3. Promoting crime prevention behaviors which are appropriate to their capabilities and resources; and

4. Promoting crime prevention behaviors which are responsive to their special victimization needs, given their particular fears, vulnerabilities, and current crime prevention practices.

The study identifies media and non-media informational and support strategies that will be more effective in increasing the level of knowledge about crime and its prevention among elderly persons and in promoting their adoption of appropriate protective measures in order to reduce their risk of victimization. Particular attention is also paid to identifying effective strategies for reducing inappropriate levels of fear and dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors among the elderly with respect to crime. Recommendations are presented as to the most appropriate kinds of information and to the most effective means of disseminating that information to promote increased crime

prevention competence among the elderly.

The basic approach is one of utilizing survey research data to:

1. Describe the national elderly population in terms of their crime prevention competence and their responsiveness to media and non-media promotional strategies;

2. Identify crime, crime prevention and communication characteristics of the elderly that distinguish them from other population groups;

3. Determine how elderly persons themselves perceive their crime-related orientations and needs and how those differ among various subgroups of the elderly based upon demographic, sociological and psychological characteristics; and

4. Specify the kinds of media and non-media strategies most likely to be effective in increasing the crime prevention competence of elderly persons.

The promotion of more active citizen involvement in reducing crime has emerged as a major issue in the criminal justice arena over the past 20 years (cf. NCPC, 1985; Greenberg, 1987; Heinzelmann, 1987; Lavrakas, 1985). Apart from such national efforts as the "McGruff" campaign, countless state and community-wide publicity campaigns have taken place, nearly all with little or no formal evaluation of their effectiveness (O'Keefe and Reid, in press, a). Crime prevention campaigns are by no means unique

in this respect; a multitude of public campaigns and other promotional efforts have been developed over recent years aimed at influencing citizens' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors on a host of social and political issues.

The Scope of Public Information Campaigns and Programs

While all public information campaigns and programs share common interests in informing and influencing the public, they often go about the job in widely diverse ways depending upon the type of problem or issue being addressed, the specific campaign objectives, the characteristics of their target audiences, and the time and money available for the effort. In general, though, most such programs attempt to combine public information or media publicity campaigns with community participation and training activities. If just "getting the word out" is the main mission of the program, more reliance on media alone is called for. On the other hand, if goals include more complex attitudinal or behavioral changes, those are apt to be accelerated by more direct forms of citizen contact and intervention. (For recent and more extensive discussion of these and related evaluative issues, see Rice and Atkin (1989) and Salmon (in press).

Strategies for Increased Campaign Effectiveness

Nevertheless, some qualified generalizations can be made about certain strategies which appear to have had more success than others. In their review of the influences of public service

advertising, O'Keefe and Reid (in press, b) comment on several factors which appear to make for more effective public-sector campaigns in general:

1. The more recent successful campaigns have incorporated theoretical models of communication or persuasion into their development. Centering a campaign around a theoretical approach not only allows a broad base of knowledge to be brought to bear on the problem, but it also provides a guiding model or structure which can help order the sometimes complex and disorganized components of contemporary campaigns. A classic example of this approach is the successful Stanford Heart Disease Prevention Program (Flora et al., 1989), which includes perhaps the most extensive and methodologically rigorous self-evaluation to date. In brief, the objective of the campaign was to reduce heart disease risk among certain normally high-risk target audiences by informing them via mass media and personal interventions of the precise nature of the risks and attempting to reduce their riskful behaviors. The campaign was based extensively upon Bandura's (1977) model of social learning theory which holds that new actions are learned by imitation or modeling of specific acts of others and solidified through selective interpersonal support and reinforcement.

2. As an extension of the above points, successful campaigns are also more likely to have a clearly delineated set of operationalized campaign goals. Planners need to specify at a minimum what kind of impact goals are being aimed at, including

the possible options of awareness, information gain, attitude change, motivation, and behavior change. Criteria should be established at the outset to allow subsequent judgement of the "success" or "failure" of a campaign. Perhaps most important is the development of unambiguous objectives for each component and stage of the campaign, and the translation of those objectives into clear message components. Care should be taken to assure that the goals are realistic. No one campaign is going to eliminate heart disease or child abuse, but messages can emphasize quite specific short-term steps which individuals can take to help alleviate the situation.

3. The more influential campaigns have made extensive use of basic advertising and marketing planning in their design and execution. These include such rudimentary design elements as concept testing, focus group analysis, pretesting of campaign materials, and tracking the dissemination of campaign materials. The "McGruff" media campaign produced by the Advertising Council resulted from audience analysis and pre-testing of possible campaign themes and formats.

As Dervin (1989), Grunig (in press) and others have indicated, inherent in successful campaign efforts is a realization that each kind of audience is going to have special characteristics and needs, and that these have to be taken into account in campaign designs. Campaign effectiveness appears in large part tied to: (1) How narrowly individual target audiences can be defined; (2) How much information about each of those

audiences can be gathered prior to the campaign; and (3) How well that information can be utilized in the design of a campaign. As Kotler (1982) suggests in his "social marketing" approach to public service campaign programs, such a systems-oriented format forces immediate concern during the planning stage with specific goals or end-products to be achieved. The approach increases the probability of a more appealing and attractive "product" in the form of campaign themes and messages particularly tailored to the target audience.

It is noteworthy that other research suggests that the above strategies have played a prominent role in community-level crime prevention information campaigns and more general crime reduction programs as well. Success has been reported in at least one instance of using well-planned anti-crime newsletters to better inform citizens (Lavrakas, 1986). Crime Stoppers programs appear more effective when a greater degree of planning and coordination occurs among police, media and citizen-participant boards of directors (Rosenbaum, Lurigio and Lavrakas, 1986). Crime reduction programs ranging from physical redesign to police re-deployment to neighborhood block programs appear enhanced by application of theoretical rationales and prior identification of realistic -- if sometimes limited -- outcomes (cf. Rosenbaum, 1986).

Summary of Formative Research on Crime Prevention and the Elderly

The present study is particularly directed toward providing

formative research to delineate and understand the characteristics of the elderly as a target audience in terms of their orientations toward crime, crime prevention, and communication. Previous studies of crime prevention and the aged have been limited by a lack of generalizability to the elderly population at large. In some cases this has been due to the use of small-scale and often non-representative samples of elderly persons. In other instances, general population samples not specifically confined to the aged have been utilized and the resulting numbers of elderly persons in those --typically on the order of 200 or less -- have not permitted reliable analyses of their particular attributes.

In order to overcome the above obstacles in a significant way, the findings of this study are based upon two sets of national probability sample survey data. The first set, or comparison sample, encompasses the combined data from two national sample surveys of the U.S. adult population carried out in 1980-81. These data allow comparisons between the elderly and other age groups on beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with respect to crime, crime prevention, and communication. The second data set, or the elderly sample, is derived from a national probability sample survey of 1,308 citizens age 60 and over conducted in March 1985. The elderly sample provides a more intensive look at not only crime prevention competence and communication behaviors among the elderly, but at their responsiveness to specific media and non-media promotional

strategies as well.

Crime and Crime Prevention Orientations. The findings indicated there is little previous evidence that the elderly are any more or less involved than other citizens in crime prevention activities, nor are there any clear indications of their prevention-related knowledge, attitudes, sense of confidence, or motivations (O'Keefe and Reid, 1986).

The issue of fear and concern about crime among the elderly is a far more complex one than earlier data suggested, and it is a multi-dimensional issue with several unresolved components. In some respects, their perceptions are congruent with reality: They rather accurately judge their chances of burglary and assault to be low, lower than other adults judge their own chances to be. In other respects, their views are obviously divergent: They feel less safe than other citizens out alone at night, although statistically their risks are less. They also believe that people their age are more likely to be victimized, presumably based upon an erroneous image of the experiences of _others_ their age, rather than their own.

It should be noted that the more fearful may believe that their personal chances of burglary or assault are low _because_ of going out alone at night less often. Moreover, as Yin (1985) and many others have speculated, the reduced crime rate among the aged is likely in part a consequence of less mobile lifestyles regardless of fear of crime.

The elderly also stand out from other adults in believing

themselves to be less knowledgeable about crime prevention and less capable of protecting themselves. They also feel less personal responsibility for doing so. This is a troubling mix of attitudes from a prevention strategy viewpoint. Informational and promotional efforts would naturally be most effective in addressing the "knowledge gap" issue by targeting to the aged messages which would build their knowledge about those crimes they are the most concerned about. And, a rise in knowledge would be expected to benefit their sense of confidence as well. But, whether increased knowledge and confidence would move to boost personal responsibility as well is a more open question. In the carrying out of actual prevention activities, elderly persons more resemble younger adults, although with some exceptions.

Communication and the Elderly. While the elderly as a group spent more time with television and newspapers, this was more a function of their particular demographic characteristics than of age per se (O'Keefe and Reid, 1988). While they watched more news and entertainment programming on television, they were less preoccupied than other adults with crime-related content, and less interested in news about crime in other media as well. They were also generally less exposed than other adults to information in general about crime prevention, and they discussed it less with other people.

Television and newspapers were the primary sources for learning about crime prevention, although the pattern of use of the various sources varied greatly depending upon gender,

education, income and other demographic factors. About half said they needed more information about crime prevention, and those tended to be lesser educated and those in poorer living environments. They most wanted information about burglary, assault and robbery. Women were more likely to actively seek such information than were men.

Those less crime prevention competent were less interested in seeking more information, posing a problem in reaching those who may need the information most. The less competent were also less attuned to mass media in general, as well as to interpersonal sources of information. On the whole, those more willing to get more active in crime prevention were already the more involved.

The previous sections have shown that while in many ways the elderly are similar to other adults in their needs regarding crime prevention, in some very important ways they are quite distinct. The differences found need to be more closely considered in the context of strategies for increasing the crime prevention competence of the elderly. The findings provide an empirical baseline to allow a more precise "targeting" of the aged for the purposes of identifying those media-based and other strategies which will most effectively increase crime prevention competence among the elderly. By taking the findings into account, such strategies may be more productively geared toward the characteristics of the aged, providing less of a risk of scattershot "hit or miss" informational and promotional efforts

which tend to be inefficient in terms of cost and effort.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Prevention campaigns and other promotional efforts aimed at the general adult populace are likely to have some influences upon aged audience segments. However, chances are that the impact will be markedly improved if the messages, formats, and communication channels used can be targeted more directly at members of that audience. The evidence presented above justifies a view that effective promotion of crime prevention among the elderly requires certain special considerations. These considerations result from the elderly typically differing from other adults in: (1) How they are victimized; (2) Their present levels of prevention competence; and (3) Their patterns of communication. In some instances it may be more effective to design certain kinds of informational efforts solely for the elderly; in many other cases it may be productive to develop special segments of more general campaigns for aged persons.

Before examining such design elements more fully, we will outline some strategic implications and recommendations derived from the findings on crime prevention and communicative differences between elderly and younger adults. A caveat is that the recommendations in particular are not meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. Rather, they are guidelines based upon general trends in the findings. If the data reveal anything, it is that it is a mistake to classify "the elderly" as a homogeneous

grouping for crime prevention -- or of course any other -- courses of action. Crime prevention practitioners faced with particular circumstances involving aged persons would do well to review the specific findings above pertinent to their own needs and situations in developing coping strategies.

Another general observation which applies across many of the matters to be discussed below is that the literature on adult socialization and related issues (cf. Birren and Bengtson, 1988) suggests that the most productive time for encouraging changes in behaviors, outlooks or attitudes is during periods of life cycle transition. The physical, economic, work-related and social transitions that most persons make in their early 60s can be said to set the stage for many of their behaviors from that point on. Promoting crime prevention to individuals during that particular period can reap long-lasting benefits. From a practical point of view, including prevention information as parts of the array of retirement and pension lectures and seminars, health promotions, and related topical efforts may be especially productive.

We first consider the implications for effective crime prevention promotion derived from: (1) What is known about victimization patterns among the elderly; and (2) Their underlying perceptions and attitudes about crime, including fear. We then address recommendations for such promotion based upon the above as well as: (1) Elderly persons' current levels of crime prevention competence; (2) Their general patterns of

communication; and (3) Their communication behaviors and needs with respect to crime prevention.

Implications of Victimization Patterns

It is important to emphasize at this point that it would be too easy and very risky to downplay the salience of crime prevention to the elderly given their substantially lower rates of victimization. Such a "by the numbers" approach to social policy belies the complexity of the factors underlying victimization, the varying ability of citizens of different age groups to cope with it, and the varying psychological, social, and economic costs of crime to people of different age groups. As Yin (1985) notes, while elderly victim rates are relatively "low", they may still be considered too high in terms of social values. It has long been established that the elderly as a group have unique needs in terms of health, economics, and general life style; crime is regarded by many as a distinctive issue for the aged as well. The increasing numbers of citizens moving into the post-50s age group over the next two decades will exacerbate the demand for attention to such matters.

Given the above, one can debate the strategic value of emphasizing to the elderly their lower chances of victimization. On the one hand, a case can be made that it is important to inform them of "the facts" concerning their actual victimization rates. This is particularly important given the gross misconception among the majority of elderly citizens that persons

in their age group are more rather than less likely to be victimized. However, at least three considerations should temper making such information a major and unqualified promotional theme:

1. It may give some of the aged an impression of over-security and cause them to carelessly let down their guard. It is most likely that at least some portion of their reduced victimization rates results from their prevention activities, including avoidant ones. Moreover, it could lead to overgeneralizations that all elderly are at reduced risk, which is clearly untrue given the above findings.

2. Factors which accelerate or reduce risk in any population are complex and interwoven. A host of life style, health, environmental and psychological variables come into play here. It would be a mistake to give an impression that elderly persons are less at risk simply because of their age. Rather, it is likely that some factors associated with age reduce risk (e.g., less mobility) while others may well increase it (e.g., physical frailty).

3. More detailed data are needed on the types of victimization various subgroups among the aged encounter, and the circumstances of those. While the Hochstedler data cited earlier are quite thorough, they deal only with central city areas and are over a decade old as well.

4. Finally, as Yin (1985) points out, such statistical presentations may have minimal impact since people may well

be more influenced by their own individual risk situations than by aggregate numbers and probabilities.

Some informational themes that can be emphasized with respect to victimization rates per se are that:

1. While the rates are generally lower than for other adults, theft takes on proportionately more import. Elderly persons should be aware of this.

2. Purse snatching and pick pocketing are crimes which the elderly are at least equally likely as other persons to be confronted with, and thus they deserve special emphasis, especially in urban areas.

3. Given their more leisure schedules, aged persons appear more likely than others to be accosted during the day as well, and they might be reminded that crime can occur at all hours.

4. At least in urban areas, their offenders are more likely to be strangers, and commonly more than one. Elderly persons are also more apt to be alone when victimized. Caution might be urged about being out alone among groups of persons unknown to them.

5. Aged persons in urban areas seem somewhat less likely to report crime than the middle-aged population, and they should be reminded of the several advantages of making such reports.

Implications of Perceptions and Attitudes about Crime

While it is true that excessive fear and feelings of vulnerability may lead to behavior that prevents some types of victimization, this behavior is often apt to take the form of avoidance activity which reduces the quality of life as well. However, the promotion of a more realistic view of their vulnerability might channel their crime prevention activity more effectively and be more socially satisfying as well. Such a more realistic view should not underplay their risks nor assume lower risks for all types of elderly persons. It should also pay adequate attention to special situational risks and to those crimes which do pose particular problems for the elderly.

Specific implications for the development of promotional efforts include:

1. As long-term strategy, emphasize means of reducing the perpetration of crimes which arouse the fears, rather than focusing too much on directly alleviating the fears themselves. That includes trying to canalize the existing fears and concerns of the elderly into constructive action against crime.

2. The prevalent notion among elderly persons that they as a group are more often victimized may be challenged by direct action. If there is one case to be made for giving greater publicity to National Crime Survey findings, it is

that informing the elderly that as a cohort they are less crime-prone than the average citizen could alleviate some of the more inappropriate fears concerning their age group. At the least, it would provide them with a more accurate view of a major social problem, and perhaps through that allow them to formulate more realistic appraisals of the meaning of crime for their generational peers.

3. Prevention promotional efforts must handle the fear issue very gingerly. The effectiveness of using fear-arousing messages has been the subject of much debate over the years. Some controversy exists over whether moderate or perhaps even higher levels of fear arousal may be conducive to persuasion, particularly when specific and presumably effective means of reducing the fear are simultaneously presented (cf. Sutton, 1982). O'Keefe and Reid-Nash (1982) found that audience members who perceived the McGruff PSAs as more fear-arousing were also more influenced by the campaign. Since those messages were strongly devoid of conscious fear stimuli, the findings imply that overt fear appeals in crime prevention messages ought to be avoided since any crime message will be arousing due to pre-existing levels of anxiety among many audience members.

4. Concern over arousing greater fear should not preclude the presentation of cautionary information realistically tailored to individual circumstances. Examples might include warnings disseminated by police or civic

organizations about crime waves in specific neighborhoods, preferably coupled with advice about prudent actions to take. Elderly persons moving into new surroundings -- group home environments, for instance -- might be advised of any risks particular to the area. More active, bolder aged persons who might be psychologically unaware of declining physical abilities might be cautioned that they could be less able to cope with criminals than in previous years.

Recommendations for Promoting Crime Prevention Competence among the Elderly

Generally, the kinds of advice given to the general population about what steps to take to help reduce crime fully hold for the aged as well. Use of lighting as a deterrent might be emphasized more, despite possible concerns about additional costs and energy conservation. A marginal drop in cooperative actions with neighbors between those in the 55-64 age group and those 65 and over may reflect changes in life style, or perhaps residential location, following retirement, and such resettlement periods may be important times for reinforcing existing behaviors as well as influencing newer and perhaps improved ones.

The findings suggest several specific recommendations for enhancing prevention competence among the elderly with respect to: (1) General strategic goals; (2) Promotional content; (3) Communication channels used; and (4) Specification of target audiences.

A. Strategic Goals

1. A key goal of promotional efforts should be to increase the information elderly persons have about how to protect themselves and others, preferably to at least the level of other adults. Such information gain is the first step in building greater competence. It is also a critical issue given the informational needs expressed by the elderly. And, the high correlation between low knowledge and high fear indicates that less knowledge on the part of the elderly may be an important component in their increased fear. In being provided with such information, the elderly who feel less knowledgeable will either discover that they knew more than they thought -- usually a rewarding outcome, or, more likely, they will actually learn more preventive techniques.

2. Given the above, greater efforts need to be made to reach the elderly as a selected target audience. Their exposure levels as a group are below those of other adults, and steps should be taken to remedy that. Methods may entail:

(a) Ensuring that crime prevention promotional campaigns aimed at the general public contain components which reach the aged in greater numbers, which appeal to them as an audience, and which address the needs of their particular situations;

(b) Designing campaigns aimed specifically at elderly

persons, and particularly those who are the most vulnerable and/or who can benefit most from exposure to them;

(c) Incorporating into community law enforcement, social service, and related organizations concerned with crime prevention programs which address the specific needs of the elderly, particularly those who are most vulnerable and/or most isolated.

3. Promotional efforts should particularly address the utility of preventive information to elderly persons. This goes hand-in-hand with using message themes which have special appeal to their needs. Once information does reach them, they are generally highly attentive to it; and the more fearful are the most attentive. However, these same individuals also indicate a greater need for such information, indicating that they are not satisfied with what they get. Options include giving them more of the same, or different kinds of content more appropriate to their needs, and/or better quality content. Efforts need to be made to target the less knowledgeable and the less confident in particular. This audience also encompasses the more socially isolated, who tend to be less exposed and less attentive, but indicate greater need.

B. Promotional Content

1. The informational areas which deserve the greatest emphasis are those dealing with how the aged might go about

protecting themselves from physical assault and robbery. These were the two crimes individuals both said they knew little about and wanted more information on. Burglary also deserves special emphasis. While it was the crime elderly persons said they knew the most about, it was also the one they most wanted more information on. As noted previously, information about burglary -- and most other forms of theft -- can typically consist of detailed and easy-to-follow steps to follow to reduce risk. Techniques which might reduce risk of assault can be more ambiguous.

Other crimes which individuals said they were less knowledgeable about were harassment by youths and elder abuse. Rather small numbers requested more information about them, however. In the case of harassment, guidelines might once again tend toward the ambiguous. Elder abuse is an "emerging" crime in the public light which likely deserves an increasing amount of publicity and attention. While only nine percent indicated a need for more information about how to protect themselves, in sheer numbers that becomes a formidable figure. Moreover, elder abuse, like child abuse, runs the risk of being a more "hidden" crime and more difficult to seek out (or prosecute). Thus, greater publicity might well be generated about it not only to the elderly, but to family members, friends, and health and social care providers.

2. It would be productive to place renewed emphasis upon the responsibilities of citizens, and elderly ones in particular, in helping to reduce crime. Many if not most large-scale campaigns over the past decade or so have included that as a component. To continue reinforcing it will do no harm, and it might be especially beneficial if the role of elderly persons in assuming responsibility could be even more emphasized. Once again, their leisure time, respect in the community, and wealth of experience should be noted as strong assets in not only acting in their own protective interests but toward safer communities as well.

The more socially isolated, as well as renters, form a target sub-audience here, despite their being more difficult to reach. The high degree to which elders regard both individual citizen and group preventive measures as effective might be capitalized upon to remind that the impact of such efforts increases exponentially with the numbers of persons involved, and that they can make a difference.

3. Messages should particularly strive to stimulate participation in neighborhood group activities, since two-thirds of the elderly said they never participated in them, but 84 percent said they would be inclined to. Specific targets include men, the more affluent, and younger elderly; these indicated the greatest likelihood of participating. Efforts to increase membership might include

outlining productive benefits to self and community, the experience the aged have to offer, and their more flexible time schedules. Keeping watch on the property of others can also be bolstered with the same rationales.

4. The finding that over a quarter of the elderly populace avoid going out "most of the time" because of crime requires effort at clear remedial action through specific promotional themes. Unfortunately, ways of alleviating the situation are not necessarily easy to either recommend or accomplish. This target audience is dominated by women, those who live alone, in less good health, and who feel less control in general. These persons have higher fear of crime, are not particularly knowledgeable about prevention, and are less apt to cooperate with their neighbors for preventive purposes. They appear fairly isolated, and a large part of the solution would seem to be to provide them with tools for more effectively coping with their situations.

They may be more likely to participate when a somewhat structured program is in place, and when they are encouraged to do so. From a promotional perspective, a productive strategy might be for existing neighborhood programs to specifically seek these people out, probably by door-to-door neighborhood walk-throughs. The offering of companionship for shopping trips and the like might well alleviate some of their tension, as well as provide a source of interaction. From that point on they might be encouraged to

participate in other forms of preventive endeavors. Media, especially television and mailings or door-to-door bulletins, may also be used to reinforce the legitimacy and benefits of available programs. In any case, the task will not be an easy one.

C. Communication Channels

Regardless of needs, what kinds of communication channels might best be used to most effectively reach the elderly as a whole and various target groups among them?

1. Use of television in general for crime prevention promotional purposes reaches the broadest possible audience, including the most and least fearful, and the more and the less prevention competent. Use of newspapers in general reaches a narrower audience of persons already somewhat more prevention competent. Thus television has more potential for addressing the less competent, but only in the broadest possible strokes.

2. What is more important in terms of general media usage is that less prevention competent aged persons use television and newspapers less for information gain and more for entertainment, companionship and other functions. This lessens the potential for media informational impact upon them, and suggests that for such audiences more direct forms of communication to augment media in campaigns may well be more productive. Many of these same individuals see less

need for prevention information, or apparently for information about other matters as well. To be reached and affected, they first must be convinced that crime prevention is important to them and deserving of their attention.

3. An easier audience are those both more fearful and concerned about being victimized as well as being more prevention competent. They also indicate a greater need for information. These individuals are far more receptive to televised and print information, as well as special efforts such as police lectures. Women and the younger elderly were especially more receptive to receiving more information. Televised efforts will be best geared toward less educated; print messages toward the more educated.

4. News media, and most notably television news and informational programs, need to be considered as the main and most preferred sources elderly people (and likely most citizens) use for finding out about crime prevention. There are several ways in which dissemination programs can take advantage of this.

One of the more obvious is for such organizations as police department public affairs or information divisions to maintain frequent contact with news media and keep them up to date on prevention-related issues, strategies and techniques. When certain crimes become publicized, especially those against the aged, how the crime might have been avoided should be stressed in news reports.

Participating with news media in granting interviews, making personal appearances on news and interview programs, writing guest columns and editorials and the like are all time-tested methods of getting the word out through the news media.

5. Televised public service announcements were rated as an unexpectedly high source of prevention information by the elderly, and their use should be continued, preferably as supplemental message vehicles in broader scale campaigns. They have the advantage of inexpensive placement at the local level, and given their wide reception they can call attention to more intensive campaign components, e.g. neighborhood watch and victim's aid programs.

6. The degree of learning provided to aged persons by television programs may hold some promise not only from crime-oriented shows, but from the recent rise in dramas and comedies with elderly characters. Depictions of social issues in popular dramas have often led to manifestly greater salience of those issues, one example being the television movie "Amos" which dealt with exploitation of the elderly in nursing homes. If elder characters on some of the more popular programs could be placed in situations of effectively dealing with crime, or presenting even off-handedly prevention tips, their impact could be great. Content appearing in entertainment programming -- and via PSAs -- has the added advantage of reaching the less

informed, less news-oriented groups.

7. Promotional planners would do well to also particularly consider radio talk and information shows. Most communities have a surfeit of such programming, and scheduling call-in interviews or guest appearances during daytime hours when more elderly persons are listening can produce some strong benefits. The format also allows presentation of greater detail in response to specific questions. Moreover, in many major media market areas there has been a proliferation of call-in advice programs about such areas as consumerism, help with personal problems, and household maintenance. Crime prevention issues can be blended into many such programs, or might provide enough content for a weekly program in its own right.

8. Special lectures or classes are apt to reach only the already more committed, and likely the more knowledgeable. However, fairly high proportions of elderly persons report having learned about prevention from community service organizations or directly from police officers, and that trend should be encouraged. Any form of community outreach efforts have a better chance of attracting the more isolated and the more vulnerable not currently in the informational loop.

9. Those with more fear and living in less affluent environments who indicate a need for more information about crime have learned more from interpersonal sources such as

family and friends. This raises two salient issues. One is that interpersonal, informal sources of information about crime prevention are an important conduit for particularly disadvantaged elderly persons. As a consequence, greater emphasis might be put on providing accurate information about the crime problems of the elderly to the public in general, who might then relay it to elder citizens with whom they are in contact. The other is that the more disadvantaged elderly indicate that they also want more information directed at them from other sources, news media in particular, and ways of responding to that preference need to be addressed.

D. Specification of Target Audiences

1. Informational messages need to be especially directed at lower income and education groups and at women of all socio-economic levels. A particular audience for preventive information of nearly all kinds are the less active, socially isolated. As noted above, reaching them may be most effective through intensive and carefully targeted media campaigns, or through concentrated community outreach programs. It is worth re-emphasizing here that when the above factors are controlled for, urban vs. suburban vs. rural differences in prevention knowledge become minimal. While urban dissemination efforts may reach greater numbers with less effort, there is every indication that

elderly in smaller communities meeting the above descriptions have similar needs. In addition, renters have need of greater knowledge about crimes involving household theft.

2. Consideration needs to be given to reaching in particular the less educated and less active among the elderly. This audience is apt to be somewhat difficult to reach through media messages since while its members are about as exposed to television and newspapers as other persons, they use media significantly less for informational purposes and more for entertainment. This suggests greater emphasis on non-media promotional efforts, as well as on such vehicles as televised PSAs which blend into entertainment programming.

3. More generally, promotional efforts need to focus more on the less prevention competent, and should attempt to take into account their particular psychological and environmental circumstances. These individuals largely appear to be the more fatalistic, those with less sense of personal control, and those leading less active lives. Such individuals also by-and-large have lower incomes, live in poorer condition areas, and probably realistically have more to fear from crime. Campaigns and other promotional efforts have more of a chore in dealing with those matching this profile. Messages tailored more to their personal and residential situations appear called for, but the task may

not be easy. Any campaigns or related efforts are unlikely to lead to changes in deep-set patterns of low internal control or fatalistic outlooks. But, it is reasonable to suggest that by providing highly specific and credible bits of information about prevention with immediate relevance to their own situations, they may gain some greater sense of power over the crime problem.

The findings for individual differences among salient groups of aged persons may be used to provide a flexible set of guidelines for crime prevention promotion within those groups. As illustrations, we will consider the development of such guidelines for elderly women, residents of poorer condition neighborhoods, and the more organizationally active.

First considering <u>elderly women as a promotional campaign target group</u>, we know that they:

* Feel less safe out alone at all times, and worry more about violent crime;
* Believe themselves less knowledgeable about protecting themselves from nearly all kinds of crime;
* Think that citizen groups help prevent crime;
* Take more deterrent and avoidant preventive behaviors;
* Are more attentive to information about prevention when they get it;
* Say they need more prevention information, especially on assaults and street thefts;

* Are less likely to start or join communication action groups, but as apt as men to more informally join with neighbors;
* Have relied more on television entertainment and PSAs as prevention information sources;
* Watch television more for companionship, and watch more daytime serials, games shows, etc.;
* Read newspapers less in general.

This profile applies to elderly women across the board, controlling for other demographic factors. It does not, however, account for many interactions with other variables, nor take into account differences in such variables as social interaction, personality characteristics and the like. Were we to design a general marketing strategy for promoting crime prevention competence among women 60 and over, recommendations would include:

1. Stress building the knowledge component of competence. Elderly women feel as responsible, effective, and as capable as men in helping prevent crime, but they aren't as likely to believe they know enough about what to do. Promotions should include all forms of crime, but emphasize the most common, e.g. burglary, and the most anxiety arousing, e.g. assault.

2. Strongly avoid messages appealing to fear or anxieties about crime. As noted above, this is an important

general guideline, but given the higher existing fear levels among women it is critical.

3. Build on their more favorable impression of citizen group involvement helping to prevent crime. Reinforce that by giving examples of how groups, especially those led by or including women, have been effective in adding to the protection of members and in reducing crime overall.

4. Reinforce their higher use of such deterrent measures as locking up and leaving on lights. Their greater reliance on avoidance raises the concerns about this technique noted previously, and recommendations on dealing with it should be made after observations of the situations of sub-target groups of women have been made.

5. Emphasize spot announcements on television, particularly during daytime serials and game shows, as one media campaign strategy. Another would be to focus on getting material on local news and information programs, which elderly women watch as much as men do. Newspaper appeals will tend to be less effective, but women report learning from other sources to about the same degree as do men.

Residents of poorer condition neighborhoods, regardless of community size, type of dwelling, etc., are more fearful for their safety day or night, see their chances of victimization as higher, and are more worried about it. Yet they feel more

knowledgeable about how to protect themselves from burglary and robbery. They avoid going out alone more. They also indicate less need for more information about prevention, perhaps feeling they know all they can, or that doing more is futile. They are less likely to learn from television, but indicate somewhat greater interest in group participation.

Effectively reaching them will be difficult. Their lesser interest in the subject increases the chance of their selectively tuning out media content about crime prevention. (They even watch crime and action dramas less.) Neighborhood and community action programs should be emphasized in these areas. Direct mailings or door-to-door brochure distribution may be helpful. It may also be that concerted neighborhood action efforts, notably including watch programs, will be the most effective means of reducing their vulnerability and fear.

On the other hand, elderly persons more active in organizations are considerably better off with respect to their lesser fear of crime and overall greater sense of competence. They take more preventive measures -- excluding avoidance -- and are more exposed and attentive to prevention information. They learn from nearly all sources. They don't feel a particular need to know more than they do about prevention. They are willing to participate in prevention-related groups. Two important factors here are likely the "connectedness" that such membership can bring, and also that many formal organizations are disseminating more information about and getting more actively involved in

crime prevention.

In fact, belonging to one or more clubs or organizations was the single best predictor of a life style freer from worry about crime, feeling knowledgeable and competent in protecting oneself, and engaging in an apparently healthy variety of preventive behaviors. While it is granted that such "joiners" have more of a tendency to be more affluent, more educated, and live in better neighborhoods, it appears to be the membership on its own which is more influential. The promotional strategy here should be to simply reinforce what is already occurring, and to try to get these people to involve their neighbors and others. This may be especially effective in more crime-prone neighborhoods.

Examples have been given based upon three characteristics: Gender, neighborhood condition and organizational membership. The findings illustrate helpful trends in the approaches of individuals to crime, its prevention, and communication. The purpose is not to specify definitive types here, but to allow practitioners to more pragmatically approach various groups among the aged with some knowledge of their crime-related characteristics. Obviously, over-stereotyping should be avoided. For example, elderly women who live in poorer neighborhoods and who join clubs will be likely to have crime and communication orientations which are an amalgamation of the above types, with still more variation occurring from their other characteristics.

Some Closing Perspectives

Utilizing the above strategic recommendations in the design of successful programs requires taking into account not only existing audience awareness, attitudes and behavior, and communication patterns, but knowledge of basic communication planning principles as well. A wealth of previous research on source, message and channel factors in influencing audiences provides a substantial resource for campaign planners intent upon matching messages to particular audiences. Sources of special interest to public information campaign strategists include Percy and Rossiter, 1980; 1983; McGuire, 1985; Rice and Atkin, 1989). Elements such as source credibility, fear appeals, use of humor, elements of message design, and channel information capacities have all been the subject of considerable research, and many of the findings have implications for media message design. As we have seen, formative research can also present profiles of the mass and interpersonal communication patterns of specific target groups, as well as address their motives for communicating and the kinds of gratifications they seek from doing so.

We also strongly argue for the integration of local neighborhood groups with more generalized media campaigns. Small neighborhood self-help groups not only prompt social interaction but also build the kinds of self-confidence that lead to control over one's environment, thereby setting the stage for learning and practicing new behaviors. As our findings suggest, group participation may have particular benefits for the elderly in

fighting crime. In addition, Heinzelmann (1987) has pointed out that citizen involvement in program planning is more likely to occur if done in the context of an existing community network or organizations of citizens who had a history of joint decision-making. Lavrakas (1985) emphasizes that the initiation and subsequent reinforcement of community groups is accelerated by local governmental and police support. Beyond that, understanding the audience or potential program receivers requires a grasp of the typical social contexts in which messages are likely to be received.

Yet another critical dimension in understanding the audience requires the campaign planner to project citizens' likely involvement in a combination of communication and action programs. That is not easy and one thing is certain -- people are unlikely to risk involvement in a public communication campaign and the actions it advocates without some chance of success. For example, likely audience involvement in preventing crime can be seen as functions of their beliefs and the likelihood that the advocated actions will reduce or eliminate the vulnerability. Techniques for estimating audience involvement along these lines include various health promotion models (cf. Green, 1984), some of which propose that individuals are motivated to carry out actions viewed as efficacious in lowering the risk of events that are seen as having potentially severe consequences. Following this logic, the greater the perceived risk and the more serious the threat, the more likely

people are to take necessary precautions if they perceive themselves as capable of doing so. Thus, the potential for communication program influence increases when the perceived benefits of taking the suggested action outweigh the costs, i.e., when the sense of efficacy or prevention competence overshadows the doubts.

Understanding the role of mass media messages in the receivers' environment is critical. A useful orientation advanced earlier in this report involves discerning the nature of the satisfactions or gratifications people derive from various communication channels and content types. Receiver or audience characteristics become the basic building blocks for setting campaign program objectives as well. Public communication campaigns generally set forth a range of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral objectives even though programming strategies and available resources frequently result in emphasizing short-term cognitive objectives -- awareness, knowledge gain, increased salience, etc. Other objectives may involve more comprehensive and synchronized programming than time and money permit, e.g., belief change, attitude change, behavioral intent change, trial behavior, and repeat action.

This study has attempted to use formative research on elderly persons to more effectively define communication strategies for improving their crime prevention competence. We have described far more fully than previously their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors with respect to crime and its prevention.

We have delineated their communication behaviors and suggested what we believe to be some productive avenues for using promotional campaigns to enhance their competence. We have outlined specific examples of campaign strategies which when, tied with our findings and general recommendations, should be useful to prevention practitioners in the further development of their own promotional approaches. We hope that the strategies suggested will be productively used on behalf of victimization reduction among the elderly, and that these and subsequent approaches will be monitored and evaluated to more fully test their effectiveness over time and to contribute as well to our knowledge of crime prevention among the elderly.

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